Previously In Captain America...

Cap has traveled to London, hoping to find Bucky, who is tracking General Lukin--the man who, unbeknownst to our heroes, is currently sharing his mind with the Red Skull. Along the way, Cap and his friends stumble upon plans for a terrorist attack on London, which they try to prevent, but the Skull's plans have been too well laid.

TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY BLITZ

CONCLUSION

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CAPTAIN AMERICA CREATED BY JOE SIMON AND JACK KIRBY

CAPTAIN AMERICA (ISSN #0274-5267) No. 21, October, 2006. Published Monthly except semi-monthly in April by MARVEL PUBLISHING, INC., a subsidiary of MARVEL ENTERTAINMENT, INC. OFFICE OF PUBLICATION: 417 5th Avenue, New York, NY 10016. PERIODICALS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, NY AND AT ADDITIONAL MAILING OFFICES.

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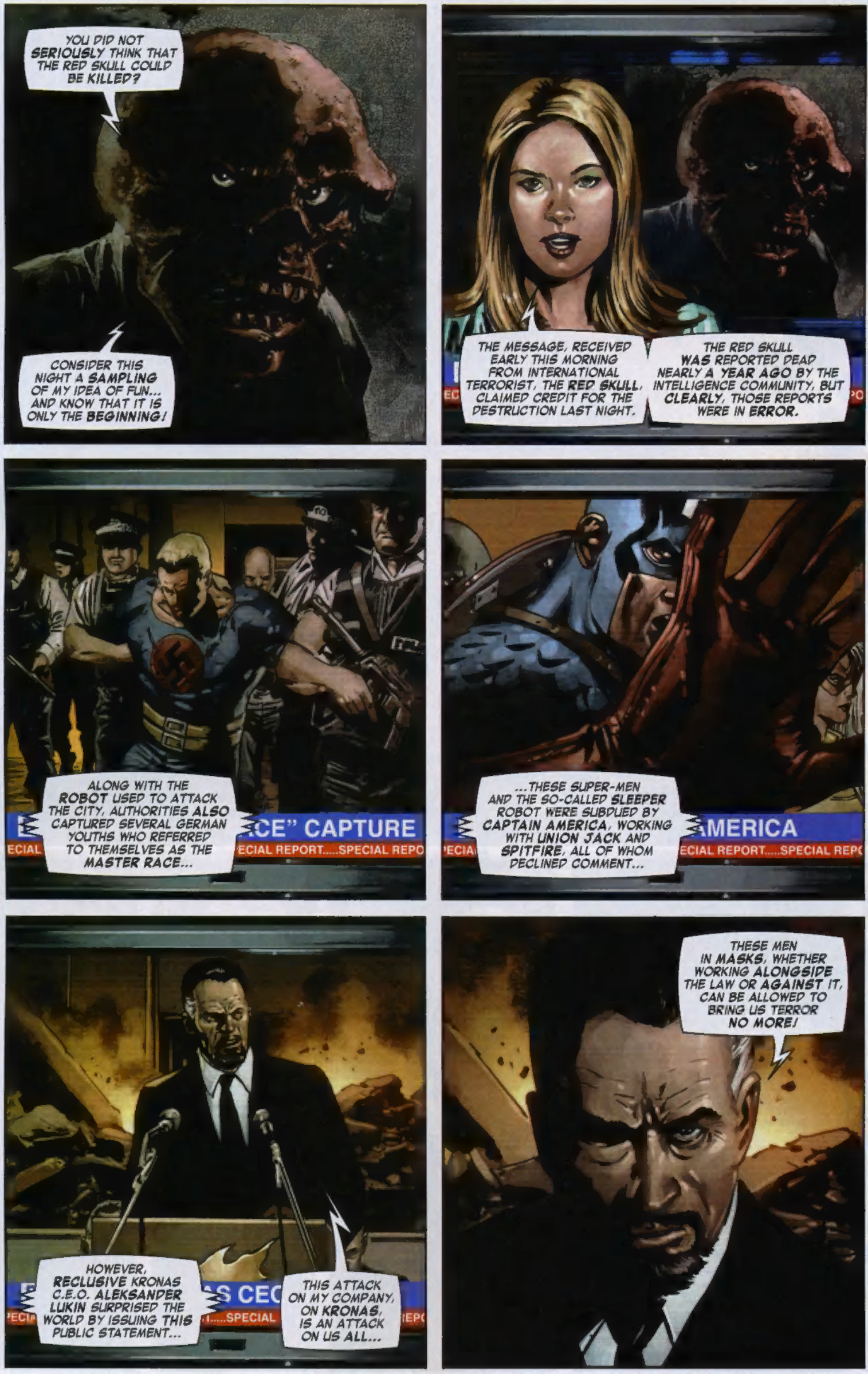
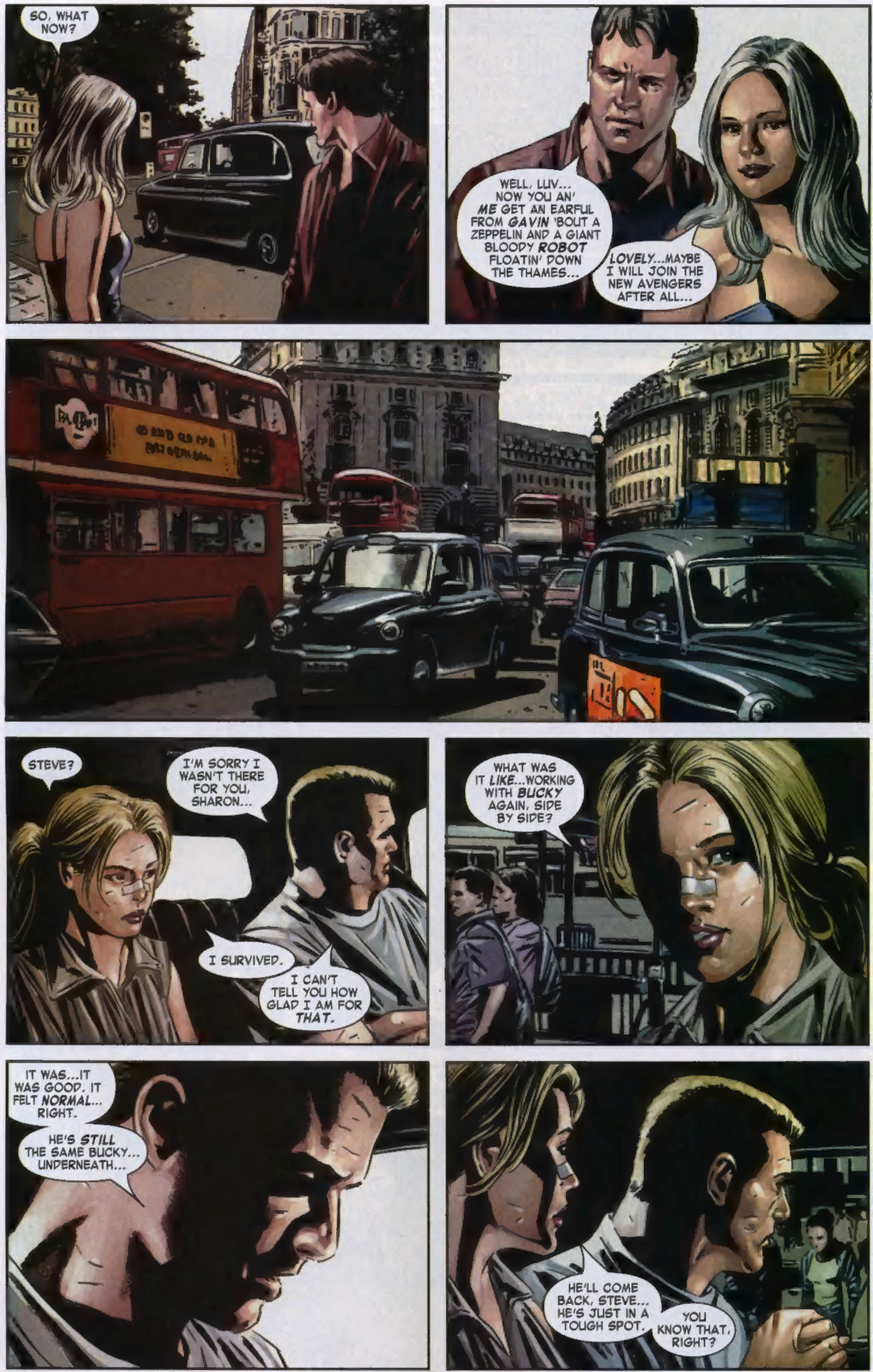
$2.99 per copy in the U.S. and $3.75 in Canada (GST #R127032852) in the direct market and $2.99 per copy in the U.S. and $4.25 in Canada (GST #R127032852) through the newsstand. Canadian Agreement #40668537. Printed in the USA. Subscription rate (U.S. dollars) for 12 issues: U.S. $27.00; Canada $37.00; Foreign $39.00. POSTMASTER: SEND ALL ADDRESS CHANGES TO CAPTAIN AMERICA, C/O MARVEL SUBSCRIPTION DEPT. P.O. BOX 30520 SALT LAKE CITY, UT 84130-0520. TELEPHONE # (800) 217-9158. FAX # (801) 208-0877. subscriptions@marvelpubs.com. ALAN FINE President & CEO of Marvel Toys and Marvel Publishing, Inc.; DAVID BOGART VP Of Publishing Operations; DAN CARR, Executive Director of Publishing Technology; JUSTIN F. GABRIE, Managing Editor; STAN LEE, Chairman Emeritus. For information regarding advertising in Marvel Comics or on Marvel.com, please contact Joe Maimone, Advertising Director, at jmaimone@marvel.com or 212-576-8534. For Marvel subscription inquiries, please call 800-217-9158.

CAP!
I'VE GOT YOU!
HANG ON!
KRRRSHHH
WHAT THE HELL WERE YOU THINKING? DO YOU KNOW WHAT THAT IS?
...RED SKULL'S DEATHBOT... LIKE IN EISENDORF...
...IN THE WAR...
THAT WAS JUST THE FIRST... HE'S IMPROVED THE DESIGN SINCE THEN.


YOU DID NOT SERIOUSLY THINK THAT THE RED SKULL COULD BE KILLED?
CONSIDER THIS NIGHT A SAMPLING OF MY IDEA OF FUN... AND KNOW THAT IT IS ONLY THE BEGINNING!
THE MESSAGE, RECEIVED EARLY THIS MORNING FROM INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST, THE RED SKULL, CLAIMED CREDIT FOR THE DESTRUCTION LAST NIGHT.
THE RED SKULL WAS REPORTED DEAD NEARLY A YEAR AGO BY THE INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY, BUT CLEARLY, THOSE REPORTS WERE IN ERROR.
ALONG WITH THE ROBOT USED TO ATTACK THE CITY, AUTHORITIES ALSO CAPTURED SEVERAL GERMAN YOUTHS WHO REFERRED TO THEMSELVES AS THE MASTER RACE...
...THESE SUPER-MEN AND THE SO-CALLED SLEEPER ROBOT WERE SUBDUED BY CAPTAIN AMERICA, WORKING WITH UNION JACK AND SPITFIRE, ALL OF WHOM DECLINED COMMENT...
HOWEVER, RECLUSIVE KRONAS C.E.O. ALEKSANDER LUKIN SURPRISED THE WORLD BY ISSUING THIS PUBLIC STATEMENT...
THIS ATTACK ON MY COMPANY, ON KRONAS, IS AN ATTACK ON US ALL...
THESE MEN IN MASKS, WHETHER WORKING ALONGSIDE THE LAW OR AGAINST IT, CAN BE ALLOWED TO BRING US TERROR NO MORE!

LAST NIGHT, LONDON WAS CAUGHT IN THE CROSS FIRE OF A SUPER-POWERED FEUD THAT NEARLY DESTROYED IT!
I CAN'T LISTEN TO THIS.
ALREADY IN THE UNITED STATES, CONGRESS IS DRAFTING LEGISLATION TO--
THE RED SKULL'S BACK, AND LUKIN'S GOING TO COME OUT OF THIS SMELLING LIKE ROSES...
WELL, HIS NEW BUILDING NEARLY COLLAPSED, STEVE...I KNOW, I WAS IN IT.
IF SPITFIRE HADN'T GOTTEN ME OUT--
OH, STOP, DEAR...IT WAS NOTHING, HONESTLY.
SURE YOU LOT DON'T NEED A RIDE? IT'S NO TROUBLE.
NO, A TAXI'S FINE, JOEY...WE'VE GOT SOME TALKING TO DO, ANYWAY.
RIGHT. GETTIN' THE STORY STRAIGHT 'BOUT WHO CRASHED THE FLYIN' PORSCHE?
SOMETHING LIKE THAT, WISEASS.
IT'S BEEN GREAT SEEING BOTH OF YOU.
I'M PROUD OF HOW YOU HANDLED YOURSELVES.
THANKS, STEVE... THAT MEANS A LOT.
YEAH... CHEERS, MATE.
P102 PLK


SO, WHAT NOW?
WELL, LUV... NOW YOU AN' ME GET AN EARFUL FROM GAVIN 'BOUT A ZEPPELIN AND A GIANT BLOODY ROBOT FLOATIN' DOWN THE THAMES...
LOVELY...MAYBE I WILL JOIN THE NEW AVENGERS AFTER ALL...
STEVE?
I'M SORRY I WASN'T THERE FOR YOU, SHARON...
I SURVIVED.
I CAN'T TELL YOU HOW GLAD I AM FOR THAT.
WHAT WAS IT LIKE...WORKING WITH BUCKY AGAIN, SIDE BY SIDE?
IT WAS...IT WAS GOOD. IT FELT NORMAL... RIGHT.
HE'S STILL THE SAME BUCKY... UNDERNEATH...
HE'LL COME BACK, STEVE... HE'S JUST IN A TOUGH SPOT.
YOU KNOW THAT, RIGHT?

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

A special letter column treat this month--Daniel Braun writes back to keep the debate about issue #15 going, and I've decided to run almost his entire letter, with comments from me intercut. Hopefully this is interesting to you all.

This is my response to the comments regarding my letter about CAPTAIN AMERICA #15. I have tried to make this letter say something new, so that I'm furthering the discussion and not just rehashing old arguments. I realize space is limited and you want to give everyone a chance to be heard. But given that my original letter became something of a target in your column, I hope you'll give me a chance to voice my reply to other readers. Thank you for printing my original letter more or less as it was sent, for your thoughtful reply, and for making good comics. An inter-fan debate in a letter column--very cool!

Honestly, I'd been hoping for something like that, because I too loved the old days when the fans would take each other to task in the letters pages of their favorite comics. I love those old letters pages where Kurt Busiek is laying into Englehart for some continuity error or bad bit of dialog.

Of course I agree with everyone who argued that people who commit violence do so for reasons beyond having read a comic book. But my original letter never claimed anything about "causes of violence"! My point (and Rodney Boyce's too, to some degree) concerned Ed's choice to depict torture as something a woman, ultimately, liked. It's interesting that even though my letter focused on Sin's behavior in response to torture, every reply to my letter (including Ed's) talked more about Crossbones' behavior. I think that's because Sin was essentially a passive character: the whole issue, she really only reacted to what Crossbones did to her. As Ed reminded us in the #17 letter column, her early reaction was to struggle against her torture. But ultimately, Sin embraced her kidnapping and torture, by literally embracing her kidnapper and torturer.

I don't have your original letter in front of me, but I think you said that our comic was encouraging and condoning violence against women. Rodney Boyce did go further than you, suggesting that our comic would actually make people abuse women, which I found an appalling suggestion, and one not based in much reality. It was a bit too Dr. Wertham for me, honestly. As a writer, and as a person who has grown up immersed in culture and media, I simply don't believe that comics or video games or cartoons create the monsters in our world. Otherwise there'd be a whole lot more of them than there are, and I'd be dropping anvils on people's heads from mountaintops.

But you're right that Sin was passive, I just don't think that means the scared girl inside her enjoyed being tormented and tortured. As I said, it was not meant to be an easy comic, and it was a depiction of evil. That Sin woke up inside the re-programmed version of herself does not mean that ANY OTHER WOMAN would react the same, thus all the history about Sin throughout the comic. She's not the average person.

My criticism was that Ed allowed readers to leave #15 secure in the knowledge that Sin, one specific woman, deserved her treatment! Why? Because of who she "really" is. This came shining through when, in her letter, Sophea Uk said, "Sin is the Red Skull's daughter in every way," and when Ed said in the #17 lettercol, "[she is] trapped by her own twisted past." Sin's "true self" (as determined by her father, NOT by her--she's passive) likes torture, likes abuse--to the point of being turned on by them.

I don't think I ever said (or implied) that she deserved any of what she got, at any time in her life. I actually think of her as a bit of a tragic figure, because of everything she's gone through since birth.

I'm sorry, folks, but those are EXACTLY the ideas used--for centuries--to blame women for being raped: the man didn't do anything wrong because, ultimately, the woman wanted it and let it happen. That's not comic-book fiction, it's ugly historical reality. Now, that's a horrible sentiment that no one--not Ed, Sophea, myself, nor anyone else reading this comic--wants to think themselves capable of agreeing with. But that's exactly the idea of women that this portrayal of Sin taps into and--here's the main problem--reproduces for a new audience.

First, those are NOT the ideas presented in our comic, and there was no hint of rape anywhere in these pages. It was a character issue about two fairly twisted individuals. It seems a bit homogenizing to suggest that any woman character represents all womankind, isn't it? And if you want to use a psychotic as a representative of all womankind, then we're really not going to get very far. I appreciate that some people, especially parents of daughters, may not see this like I do, but I don't think Sin represents anyone other than herself in this comic. She was a victim here, and now she's a full-blown villain in her own right, again.

Ed, you defend your right and choice to depict acts that (we all agree) are "evil...abhorrent... vicious" etc., and I don't dispute that. My point has been that when you do so, you should also make every effort to include IN that same comic some actual content that characterizes those acts as abhorrent, evil, etc.

See, I think abhorrent acts are abhorrent precisely because you don't need to be told they are. I don't think our readership needs to be told by us that kidnapping and torture are bad things. I'm sure they all watch TV, and see the news at least sometimes. But beyond that, I don't think fiction operates that way, it's not about point-counterpoint, or balance. It's not an editorial or reporting, and it doesn't have a point of view. It's a story.

I agree that art, including comics, should push against some social norms and ideals. I also think that artists should have the sense, the smarts and the guts to recognize when their own product is reinforcing some crappy norms and ideals too, and work against that as well.

#15 aside, thanks Ed, Steve, et al for keeping CAPTAIN AMERICA interesting.

Daniel Braun

Thanks for writing back, Daniel, and keeping the great debate going. We may not agree on this, but I'm glad you're still onboard.

Okay, now I'm going to take a moment to plug a few new books coming out soon that should be of interest to Cap readers. First, we have the UNION JACK limited series coming soon from Christos Gage and our own Mighty Mike Perkins. I got to hear about this book from the early stages on, and I've read the first issue, and I'm telling you right now, you're going to really dig it. It follows up on the events you just finished reading here, and it's packed with action. So, ask for it by name.

And lastly, let me call your attention to the new series I've got launching from Marvel's Icon line in October, CRIMINAL. This is a book I've been wanting to do for a long time, and one I think any mature fans of my work on Cap or DD will really enjoy. And bonus--it's drawn by best-selling MARVEL ZOMBIES artist Sean Phillips, who is doing the best work of his career right now. You can find free previews of the book online at www.edbrubaker.com, so please go check it out, and tell your retailer if you like what you see.

And that's all until next month, when we finally jump into the Civil War, which is going to lead to the biggest Cap storyline so far.

--Ed Brubaker

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